



## Helping Families Get the Health Care They Need: Why the Children's Health Council is Necessary

February 2002

The Governor's Budget for State Fiscal Year 2002-2003 proposes the elimination of the Children's Health Council (CHC). The CHC, along with the Connecticut Children's Health Project and the Children's Health Infoline, which are funded through the CHC:

- Helps families get care for their children in a confusing and complex health care system,
- Ensures that families get the benefits intended by the legislature in creating HUSKY,
- Provides the only independent, reliable source of information on the care that children in HUSKY actually receive, and
- Reduces the number of uninsured children.

### Helping children get care

Signing up families for HUSKY is only the first step in ensuring that children get the health care they need. Children need a consistent health care provider (a "medical home"), and they need regular, preventive, well-child visits. However, after six years of Medicaid managed care in Connecticut, the CHC has found that nearly one in five children enrolled in HUSKY A did not get any health care at all in the course of a year, and less than one-half of children enrolled all year got a well-child exam.

Through the Children's Health Council's monitoring and data analysis, policy makers and communities have a source of independent and reliable information on the health care services that children in HUSKY actually receive. CHC tracks the use of well-child care, dental care, and other services, and identifies areas for program improvement:

- **Health care for children in state custody improved** - As a result of research by the CHC

showing that children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) were less likely to receive well-child care, DCF designed an effective way of using information from the CHC to ensure that children get their check-ups on time. Now children in DCF custody are *more* likely than other children in HUSKY to receive timely well-child care.

- **Disparities targeted** - The CHC has found that African American children enrolled in HUSKY A are less likely to receive preventive care. At the request of the DSS Commissioner, the CHC is working on a study designed to determine why this is happening and to find solutions to this problem.
- **Injuries to children investigated** - As a result of a study finding that one in every five children enrolled in HUSKY A was treated for an injury, the CHC is bringing together DSS, the Department of Public Health, HUSKY health plans, the Connecticut Injury Prevention Center and others to find ways to reduce the incidence of childhood injuries.

### Overcoming barriers to health care

Every week, hundreds of families call the Children's Health Infoline (CHIL) when they are unable to get the health care services they need. The experienced CHIL care coordinators help these families find dentists for their children and get their prescriptions filled when needed medication is denied at the pharmacy counter. Families facing the fear of unpaid medical bills and collection agencies know they can turn to CHIL for support and a resolution to their problems. When a family with a sick child is denied services that the doctor feels are medically necessary, CHIL helps file an appeal to get the services the child needs. CHIL is a vital part

of the HUSKY program, assuring that health plans provide consistent and quality health care to children and families.

As the “ombudsprogram” for HUSKY, CHIL is the only independent source of information on the “real life” experiences of families in HUSKY A. By documenting systemic problems and helping families overcome barriers to care, CHIL helps to improve health care services for all families in HUSKY:

- Early in the managed care program, callers to the CHIL reported that they could not get care for their newborn infants because there were delays in enrolling the babies in a health plan. Working with DSS, a new centralized system for enrolling newborns was developed to eliminate these delays.
- Because CHIL found that many families with limited English proficiency have difficulties getting services, the CHC convened a work group that is now finding ways to improve services at regional DSS offices, managed care organizations, and health care providers.
- Because pharmacists often have trouble confirming HUSKY members’ health plan enrollment, many families call CHIL with problems getting prescriptions. To address this problem, CHC has developed educational materials for pharmacists on how to verify a HUSKY member’s enrollment.

### **Reducing the number of uninsured children**

There are at least 34,000 uninsured children in the state who are likely to be eligible for HUSKY coverage. The Children’s Health Council is the catalyst for activities that have significantly decreased the number of uninsured children through enrollment in HUSKY.

The Covering Connecticut’s Kids and Families coalition is a collaboration between almost 200 individuals and organizations that is led by the CHC. This coalition has effectively increased enrollment through a Back-to-School campaign in 2001. Coalition work with DSS has resulted in improved notices to families and improvements in administrative procedures that affect eligibility.

### **Connecting with communities**

Schools, childcare centers, health providers, businesses, faith-based groups, and local outreach projects rely on the community health educators from the Connecticut Children’s Health Project. They provide the practical, hands-on information community groups need to help families enroll and stay enrolled in HUSKY and to help families get care.

### **Increasing funds for children’s health**

Over \$2 million dollars in additional funding for HUSKY outreach and for improving health care services for children can be attributed to the CHC. Most of this funding will be lost if the CHC loses its state funding.

- CHC has a four-year, \$1.15 million grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) as part of its Covering Kids and Families initiative. Over half of this funding supports local outreach projects in Bridgeport and Stratford, Stamford, and five East of the River towns (East Hartford, Glastonbury, Hebron, Manchester, and Vernon). RWJF also provided extensive paid radio and TV advertising for the 2001 Back-to-School campaign.
- CHC has a \$400,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to operate the Hartford HUSKY Outreach Project, which provides outreach and face-to-face application assistance to families in Hartford, where HUSKY enrollment has been particularly slow.
- CHC was recently awarded a \$68,000 grant by the Connecticut Health Foundation for a research project designed to find ways to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in HUSKY health care services.

Without state funding, the help that the CHC offers to families through direct services and through its collaborative efforts to improve the HUSKY program cannot continue. The CHC should remain as a key component of the HUSKY program.